



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVILIAN RELIEF

BY MARGARET F. BYINGTON,

Assistant to Director General, Department of Civilian Relief, The American Red Cross.

Within the past year nearly three million men have received from the selective service boards a brief notice that they are now in the service of the United States Government and on a given date are to report for duty. To each man this has meant a total revolution, a break from all accustomed routine and personal ties that must be very overwhelming. In the few days interval before he starts, innumerable decisions seem called for and endless anxieties arise.

Perhaps the man is leaving a young wife who needs his counsel as never before. He knows that the government will make an allowance to his family from its funds, but he wonders how much it will amount to and what he has to do to get it. He is buying a home; what will he do about the payments which fall due while he is away? He had planned to send his sister to normal school; will she have to go to work instead? His mother is just able to do her work now; what will happen if her rheumatism gets worse next winter? Everyone who has ever started on a long journey knows how, as the moment of departure approaches, such questions as these throng into one's mind. It is at that moment that the Civilian Relief Department of the American Red Cross steps forward and offers, through its home service sections, to serve as next friend to the fighting man's family while he is away, helping it to meet these problems and other unexpected ones which will arise later.

The government in calling men to serve in the National Army has indeed accepted a definite responsibility for the welfare of their families and has, to this end, provided through the War Risk Insurance Law allowances from government funds to supplement what the man contributes from his pay. It offers the men insurance at a low cost; it provides medical care and reëducation for every man who is wounded or disabled by sickness; it provides compensation as long as he is disabled. This program, however, must of necessity be developed in the large without relation to the needs of

particular communities or individuals. Skillfully as the law has been drawn, the allowance for a family of a given size will not be equally sufficient for one which owns its house and garden in a village and for one which lives in a city tenement. Nor can the government possibly create any machinery through which it can help people solve these intimate personal problems which grow out of the man's departure.

The Department of Civilian Relief has therefore undertaken to help in the adjustment of these inevitable inequalities; to see that the families of men in the service maintain their normal standards of living; to stand by the lonely and discouraged wives and mothers. If all is going well at home and letters are full of cheering news, the men at the front will have courage for their task overseas. Mr. Persons said on his return from France:

That our men may be protected as far as possible from worry about their families, and that nothing else that will maintain morale be left undone, it is obvious that the American people must see to it that no family of a soldier lacks for anything that will enable it to write honestly cheerful letters abroad. Any condition which would disturb its representative on the front and make him anxious to return and set things right must be cured and without delay.

An American commander at the front and a leading military surgeon in Paris, both stated that the Red Cross could do nothing more important from a military standpoint than to maintain the welfare of the homes of our fighting men. The American soldier is a man of spirit and action; not disposed to worry about himself, but likely to be deeply anxious about the welfare of those dear to him, who, far away, are beyond any help that he can give in time of acute emergency or trouble.

So the Civilian Relief Department will play its part in helping to win the war and in seeing that family life is kept as wholesome as may be in this time of suffering and loss. To provide wise and helpful service to every soldier's family which seeks it is, however, a colossal task. A year ago the Department of Civilian Relief was carrying on its only activities through its thirteen division offices and national headquarters. Now nearly 5,000 chapters scattered all over the country are organized for this service, with 20,000 workers enlisted in their ranks; 300,000 families have already asked some service of their local home service sections.

How is this colossal program in organization being achieved? At one end is the Washington headquarters office with its bureaus which endeavor to relate the activities of the great government

departments to individual needs as indicated in the succeeding articles on "Information Service" and "Disabled Soldiers." The department also has special home service representatives in the camps both here and overseas with whom any man who is worried about some home problem can talk things over. These representatives will, through appropriate channels, report this difficulty to the home service workers in the town where the man lives; they will in turn try to adjust the matter and then send word back to the soldier telling him how affairs are progressing at home.

These two cables taken just by themselves show what it must mean to a disheartened worried soldier to receive back through the home service section this prompt assurance that all is well at home.

From the home service representative in France:

Stevens is much worried about his wife and child as he has not heard from them since March. He would greatly appreciate a report on their present welfare and the assurance that the Red Cross will take care of them should they need any assistance.

From the home service worker in the man's home town:

Our visitor known Mrs. Stevens well all winter. Red Cross aided regularly until allotment over two hundred dollars came in May making her very comfortable. Some money advanced. Wife and baby well, going to seashore for change. Mrs. Stevens writes husband regularly, probably incorrect hospital address. Writing details.

Between this national headquarters and the local sections are thirteen division offices, in each of which is a director of civilian relief, whose task it is to stimulate and direct the organization and work of the home service sections. While a considerable degree of initiative rests with the local committee, they are nevertheless subject to direction and advice from these offices. There are now some 200 workers on the division staffs, including field representatives who visit the sections, helping to see that their committees are properly organized and to develop higher standards of service in the newer or weaker ones.

These division offices are also responsible for another phase of civilian relief work and one which has been its most important peacetime activity, the care of civilians suffering as the result of some disaster, fire, flood or tornado. This is also a war service, since through it the Red Cross stands ready to assist in disasters growing out of war activities. It organized, for example, extensive relief

after the Eddystone explosion. It had a squad of workers on the dock at half-past six in the morning to meet and care for the survivors of the torpedoed *Carolina*.

The heart of the work, however, lies in the 5,000 chapters of the Red Cross now organized all over the country. Each of these chapters, which is usually responsible for a county, has a number of committees dealing with various activities such as surgical dressings, hospital garments, etc., one of which, the Home Service Section of the Civilian Relief Committee, has special charge of the work for the families of soldiers, sailors and marines. On this committee are serving those people in each community who would be best able to advise people in perplexity, such as the doctor, clergyman, school-teacher, business man or lawyer, women of intelligence and tact. Each of these committees has a chairman and secretary responsible for carrying on the work; most of them have an office and a telephone. The chaplain tries to make widely known the fact that any family which has a representative in the fighting forces can turn there for advice on any problem by advertising in the local newspapers, by letters to the men before they leave and to their families afterwards, and by placards in post-office and church and grange.

Money for running expenses and for the relief of the families who need it is a just charge on chapter funds. So far, over \$2,000,000 has been spent in the relief of families by the whole department. This included loans to tide over people until their allowances were received; grants to meet special needs such as medical care, needed vacations, interest on mortgages, etc.; regular allowances when government checks are not sufficient to provide a wholesome life. Large as this sum is, the giving of material relief is a small part of the service rendered to these families, as we shall note later.

In the larger cities the burden is already a heavy one, requiring extensive organization. The Boston chapter had, before March 1, been in touch with 2,239 families. In March it had a staff of over 200 workers, most of them volunteers, and spent about \$10,000 in relief. A similar burden of work is being carried in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and all other large centers of population.

Even in rural districts, however, home service work must also be organized, since the few families in some small town should have just as careful and sympathetic help as the many in the big

city. The divisions aim to secure a home service representative within an hour's journey of each family in the United States. This cannot of course be achieved in sections like the Mountain Division where one representative lives on a ranch forty miles from the railroad and many miles from her nearest neighbor. The Red Cross is definitely striving, however, to make its interest available for every lonely or disheartened wife or mother by organizing for effective service the original impulses of neighborly kindness.

Is there need of this elaborate organization and what are the actual services which these groups are rendering? Home service sections are not given to compiling statistics,—in fact, it is hard to get some chapters to even report the total number of families who have been seeking their advice. In order to make tangible the problems confronting them, it may be well to quote a few facts from a special study made of 50 families in one city chapter, showing how many of these personal complications which the war creates are brought to home service workers and the kinds of service they have been able to render. Of these 50 families, 38 were feeling especially the loss of the wage-earner. Nine of the women seemed overwhelmed by the loss of the man's companionship; 46 of them were worried about his welfare (one wonders about the four that were not). Twenty-seven of the men in service were worried about those families of theirs; 46 families asked for information about allotment and allowance.

Let us put these figures into more human terms. One little Italian widow cannot sleep nights because of her terrors in the lonely house now that her son is gone; an old Yiddish mother, half paralyzed and dependent upon the care of her one son, weeps night and day inconsolably. Mrs. Hart, for all that her Paul was as erratic as husbands come, "couldn't get used to keeping house just for the children and it was terribly hard on Sundays as she missed her husband so." Young Ecco, his aunt said, "was the light of the house, always merry and joking and kept up the spirits of the family."

The visitors from the home service sections are trying to overcome in some measure this loneliness and anxiety by giving to these wives and mothers the assurance that someone cares and will stand back of them. As one soldier writes, "It is you who have again brought sunshine into our home." It is often possible, too, to give those who do not read easily or who live in remote districts, a more

vivid sense of the meaning of the war, so that they may perhaps feel themselves part of the nation in its war sacrifice.

One wishes that it were possible, as it never can be, to put into words the quality as well as the quantity of service rendered. Because these volunteers have offered their services in a spirit of patriotism and enthusiasm, because so many of them wear service pins themselves, they are able to establish unusually helpful relations. While it is impossible to sum up the services rendered, a few illustrations of what was done for these 50 families will indicate the breadth of the work. In 27 instances the men were urged to take advantage of the War Risk Insurance Law, and in 19 the men's officers were asked to talk to the men about it. In 17 instances men in service were informed about facts concerning the welfare of their families, including announcements of the arrival of two new babies. There was much sickness, not all of it due to war worry, and 35 families received medical care. Employment was found for 10 people, several of them too handicapped to secure it for themselves; 6 families were helped to move to better homes, 13 mothers received much-needed instruction about how to buy more wisely or how to solve financial problems—a difficulty that often arises where the man has always been the financial manager. In half these families, at least, special plans were made to stimulate their interest in life by means as varied as parties and participation in Red Cross work. Some material relief, chiefly temporary, was given to 45 of these 50 families. Often more serious service problems were encountered—death, moral delinquency, desertion. The problems of these families are as varied as human life, and call for skill and patience in the solution.

The chapters in rural districts are proving to have problems as difficult. The blind wife of a man in the Regular Army was visited almost daily by the members of the home service sections. At the time when her baby was born the child of three was sent to relatives in a nearby town. When the home service secretary asked the mother if she would like one of the motor service girls to take her for an automobile ride she asked timidly whether she could be taken as far as this other town—"so that I can feel my little girl's face again." Her life is built these days around the sympathy and understanding of these workers.

A woman who had been suffering from ill health for years was

sent by the home service section to a nearby city for an operation; the little child with trachoma was brought from her mountain home for treatment. There are some even more distinctively rural problems to be encountered, as in the case of the chapter that secured the promise of 200 farmers to give the hours from seven to nine any evening, on call of the home service secretary, to work on the farm of women whose husbands had gone a-soldiering.

We may quote from the recent report of one field representative in the southwestern division, "The request for advice on coöperating with the guardians of Mississippi Choctaws which opened the question box on family problems in Oklahoma City may have been somewhat disconcerting but need cause no surprise, for rural neighborhoods have every problem of the city and more. Blanket Indians riding in automobiles with chauffeurs, Bohemian colonies living old-fashioned, hard-working, thrifty lives, little oil towns with shifting populations of as many as thirty-two different nationalities and three small villages exclusively of negroes who will tolerate no white folks in their midst are some of the varieties of background in Oklahoma's home service problem. The Mexican colonies throughout the southwest, so picturesque to the tourist, contribute a full share of complexity to the standards of family care. The little cotton farms of Texas and Arkansas, often held by negroes, present acute difficulties when the sons who were farm hands are drafted; and Kansas and Missouri's rural situation is no less pressing though so large a proportion of the population is American white. One may get off the train at a way station almost anywhere, however, to find a home service sign posted by the ticket office window, and feel the comforting assurance that the Red Cross is on the job.

The home service program is, in short, to let every soldier and every soldier's family know that this group of people in his own home town is ready to stand by his family during his absence in any crisis that may arise. It does not intrude its services, going only to those families which have expressed the desire to have such advice. Its first responsibility is to provide the simple human friendliness that is so needed in the dark days which inevitably come. But it also seeks to give intelligent as well as kindly service, to solve some of the problems which the family itself has always considered insoluble; to give material relief when that is needed.

The great problem confronting the national organization has been to see that this service is intelligent as well as kindly. Obviously it is not possible to find enough trained social workers to put one in every county in the United States, even if the amount of work always justified it. Yet in serving some of these families there is need for just as skilled service as that given by the organized social agencies of our large cities. In the large cities the problem, while difficult enough, has not been carried out on any new principle. Trained social workers have been put in charge and have drawn into service large numbers of volunteers. Nothing has been more illuminating than the number of women who have been willing to take training to prepare themselves for this work and who are, even through the hot summer months, serving with unfaltering devotion.

The problem in the small towns and the rural districts is more difficult and while it has by no means been solved, experiments are being tried which will be instructive in the whole field of rural social work. It is the first time that an attempt has been made to cover the whole country with a network of local agencies and to establish in them sound standards of social service. Knowing that it would of necessity have to place this responsibility in the hands of local people, the Department of Civilian Relief has been developing plans for giving them some training for the task. The field representatives of the division offices who are, most of them, trained social workers, have also been chosen for their flexibility and willingness to adapt their standards to the needs and opportunities of rural life. Such a representative when visiting a small chapter may spend a whole day with the secretary and chairman, going over individual family situations with her, showing her what are the problems that need consideration and skilfully suggesting possible methods of solution.

Conferences are also held from time to time. Recently in Kansas 165 delegates from home service sections in various parts of the state came together for three days of solid discussion of these problems, one delegate coming 375 miles to attend it. Slowly but surely they are coming to see by what methods their work can be made truly valuable.

Another method for training the workers is through the home service institutes, six weeks' training courses which are now given in twenty-six cities, in affiliation, usually, with a local school for

social work of the sociology department of a university—twenty-four hours of lectures are given on the methods of dealing with home service families, child welfare, health, women in industry, etc. In addition each student has to do 150 hours of field work in some case work agency of good standards. Already 718 students have graduated from such courses and practically all of them are doing active home service work.

By these methods, by the careful preparation of literature and by constant correspondence, the Department of Civilian Relief is slowly but surely developing its work throughout the country. It hopes soon to be able to say that no soldier's family need to carry any anxiety which can be solved by intelligent helpfulness. Through its educational activities, moreover, some understanding of the significance of social welfare work is spreading into our rural communities and will be of service not only to the families of our fighting force, but as a nucleus for an increasing understanding of the means of social regeneration.

Unquestionably one of the great opportunities of the war as well as one of its dangers, lies in the tendency to centralize all activities in great governmental or quasi-governmental bodies. Communities and individuals will accept suggestion and direction from without as never before. On the other hand, if local initiative and interest should thereby be lost, the after-the-war problem would be greatly intensified. The American Red Cross is attempting to secure the advantages and minimize the dangers of this situation. Through its national headquarters it works out relationships to other national organizations, it develops policies and offers training. Through its local groups it is drawing into service thousands of devoted men and women who are getting a new vision of the possibilities of social service and community betterment which they will carry over into peace times. In the meantime they are loyally performing this essential war service.